

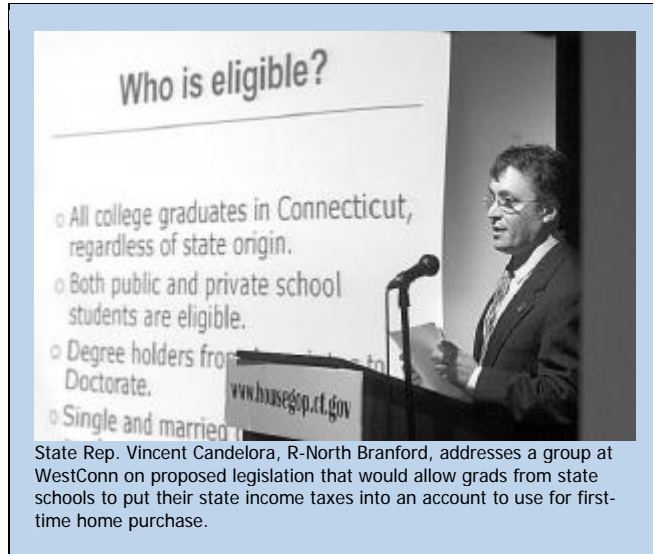
## State could help students buy a first home

By Dirk Perrefort  
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DANBURY-- Monica Perry, like many students her age, has considered moving out of state because of the high housing costs here.

"I was born and raised in Danbury, and I would love to stay here," said Perry, 24, a nursing student at Western Connecticut State University who works at Danbury Hospital. "But there's no way I can afford anything in this area. I've looked at some houses in New York state because Connecticut is just too expensive."

Perry said many of her friends have moved away or are still living with their parents. Some have fled to New Jersey, while others have moved to New York and Pennsylvania.



"Even living at home it's tough to save enough money for a house because things are getting so expensive," she said. "Especially while trying to pay for graduate school."

Perry and about a dozen other students attended a presentation at the university Monday about a proposed state program that could help them purchase their first home.

The proposed legislation would allow graduates of Connecticut public or private colleges to use the money they pay in state income taxes to help buy a house; they could save up to \$3,000 annually for as long as 10 years.

The money would be kept by the state and any interest would be used to pay for the cost of the program.

State Rep. John Frey, R-Ridgefield, said the proposal has bipartisan support in the state legislature. He said the program is needed to prevent a drain of college graduates from the state.

"The state is losing its population at a rapid speed, and we have to do something about it," he said. "One of the main reasons people are leaving is the cost of housing. It's getting more and more difficult for people to find affordable housing in the Danbury area."

Frey added that area employers are having a difficult time finding qualified employees because of the number of college graduates leaving the state.

State Rep. Vincent Candelora, R-North Branford, who spoke during the WestConn presentation Monday, said he found it difficult to save enough money for his first home purchase several years ago.

"This proposal will help Connecticut's best and brightest stay home," Candelora said.

Steve Westerfield, a criminal justice student from Redding, said a lot of students could benefit from the program.

"There are a lot of people who want to stay here but can't afford it," he said. "I've thought of moving out of here myself, but this is what I know, it's where I was raised. I don't want to leave unless I have to."

The proposal, which passed unanimously in both the Housing and Economic Development committees, now awaits a vote by both the House and Senate.